

PACT Act. We passed that bill with 84 votes in favor of it, something that rarely happens around here.

This bill was supported by the President; it was supported by the VA Secretary; and it was the No. 1 priority for nearly every major veterans advocacy group in the Nation. In fact, I cannot think of one that this wasn't the No. 1 priority for.

Upon passage, it was transmitted to the House, and they indicated that they would move it within days to the President's desk. Unfortunately, after Senate passage, the bill ran into a procedural hurdle, as bills often do around here, but tonight we have a chance to get back on track. We have a chance to get it to the House without further delay. And I might add, what this bill does is it takes care of a decades-long issue with toxic exposure.

The ranking member, Senator MORAN, and I talked about this bill a week or two ago at length. This bill will help save veterans' lives who have been exposed to toxins and will help support their families after they passed. I would hope my colleagues will keep that in mind as they decide whether this is an appropriate time to play political games, to delay this bill's ability to become law, and obstruct for the sake of obstruction.

Everyone in this body knows that our veterans deserve more than that. They have waited long enough for the care and the benefits that are provided by this bill, and they shouldn't have to wait any longer because it did receive 84 votes in this body a week or so ago.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Secretary of the Senate be authorized to request the House of Representatives to return the papers on H.R. 3967; I further ask that notwithstanding the lack of receipt of the papers, the Senate proceed to the immediate consideration of the Tester resolution that is at the desk to remove the blue-slip provision in the PACT Act; that the resolution be agreed to and the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table without intervening action or debate.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

The Senator from Pennsylvania.

Mr. TOOMEY. Mr. President, reserving the right to object, and let me be clear that the nature of my objection is not about the fact that this legislation authorizes about \$280 billion, I think, for healthcare for veterans that resulted from toxic exposure and it creates new categories of eligibility and it contemplates this and authorizes this \$280 billion of additional spending over 10 years.

What everybody should be aware of is that absent of this legislation, existing statute already obligates the Federal Government, through the VA, to spend about \$400 billion over the next 10 years on veterans' healthcare that results from veterans being exposed to toxic circumstances during their serv-

ice. So there is \$400 billion that preexisted this bill and \$280 billion of new spending.

Now, the \$400 billion that we were already going to spend—and we will spend—is put under the discretionary spending caps in that category of discretionary spending because, as you know, discretionary spending is limited. There is a cap every year on how much can be spent in this discretionary spending category. There is one other category of spending around here, and that is mandatory spending that is not subject to caps. That is just unlimited whatever is required.

The legislation puts the \$280 billion in new spending in the mandatory spending category, and we can argue about whether that is a good idea or not. I don't think it is a great idea, but that is not what really is outrageous about what is going on here. What is really outrageous is in this legislation, they take the \$400 billion that was going to be spent anyway that is already preexisting under existing statute—they take that out of discretionary spending and move it over to mandatory spending.

Why would they do a thing like that? Why would that be necessary to move \$400 billion that is already authorized to be spent under current law and move it out of discretionary and into the mandatory spending? The reason is because that way you create a big gaping hole in the discretionary spending category, which can be filled with another \$400 billion of totally unrelated spending. Who knows on what? That is why it had to be moved out of discretionary and into mandatory spending.

My objection isn't about the substance of this bill. It is about this budgetary gimmick that is designed to allow hundreds of billions of dollars of additional spending on totally unrelated, who-knows-what categories. We have inflation hitting a 40-year high. We have a government that has been spending trillions of dollars, too much money—printing the money to spend—and everybody sees it every day at the pump, at the grocery store, everywhere. And what this gimmick does is it makes it possible to spend yet another \$400 billion.

This is terrible policy. I am going to suggest the modification to the unanimous consent request from my friend—and he is my friend—from Montana. And it is very simple. It says nothing about the \$280 billion in new spending that is permitted under this legislation. It simply would keep the \$400 billion that we were going to spend anyway, keep it right in the category that it has always been in—keep it in the discretionary spending category so that it doesn't create this hole that gets filled with another \$400 billion on who knows what. That is what my amendment does.

My amendment wouldn't reduce spending on veterans' healthcare by a penny. It wouldn't, in any way, impede the ability of veterans to get the

healthcare that they need as a result of toxic exposures. It has nothing to do with that. It is only about preventing huge, excessive spending in other categories—who knows what—that would be permitted under this bill.

Mr. President, therefore, I ask unanimous consent that the Senator modify his request to include my amendment to the Tester resolution; that the amendment be considered and agreed to; that the resolution, as amended, be agreed to, and the motions to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table without intervening action or debate.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection to the modification?

The Senator from Montana.

Mr. TESTER. Reserving the right to object. I don't know where to start.

First of all, this amendment does nothing to fix the blue-slip issue that was the real problem here. That was a de minimis amount of money anyway. Nonetheless, it is a blue-slip issue, and we have to fix it.

I would wholeheartedly disagree with my friend, the Senator from Pennsylvania, in saying that what you are actually doing is stopping benefits from veterans with this amendment. We are a body here in the U.S. Senate. If you want to talk about the appropriations process, we can talk about the appropriations process. But in the process of those debates, you shouldn't be denying healthcare to veterans, which is exactly what the good Senator from Pennsylvania is doing today. For that reason, I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

Is there objection to the original Tester request?

Mr. TOOMEY. I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

The majority leader.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, I move to proceed to legislative session.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is on agreeing to the motion. The motion was agreed to.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, I move to proceed to executive session to consider Calendar No. 599.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is on agreeing to the motion. The motion was agreed to.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the nomination.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read the nomination of Ashish S. Vazirani, of Maryland, to be a Deputy Under Secretary of Defense.

CLOTURE MOTION

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, I send a cloture motion to the desk.